

Message Text

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OCON

SUBJ: FIRST MEETING WITH MDFA ADDITIONAL SECRETARY WIJEYERATNE

REF PARIS 32644

1. I PAID COURTESY CALL MARCH 11 ON TISSA WIJEYERATNE, CURRENTLY SRI LANKA'S AMB TO FRANCE AND SWITZERLAND, WHO HAS BEEN NAMED TO THE NEWLY DESIGNATED POSITION OF ADDITIONAL SECRETARY IN MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS (MDFA). ATTIRE IN NATIONAL DRESS, WIJEYERATNE RECEIVED ME IN LARGE OFFICE USUALLY USED BY MDFA DEPMIN LAKSHMAN JAYAKODY, AN OFFICE WHICH IS CONSIDERABLY LARGER THAN THAT OCCUPIED BY MDFA SECRETARY W T JAYASINGHE. DEPCHEIF OF PROTOCOL, WHO ESCORTED ME TO WIJEYERATNE'S OFFICE, REMAINED THROUGHOUT MEETING. I GATHER THAT ALL OTHER AMBASSADORS AND HIGH COMMISSIONERS ARE NOW BEING ASKED TO CALL ON WIJEYERATNE, WHO RETURNS TO PARIS SHORTLY TO WIND UP HIS AFFAIRS AND WHO IS NOT SCHEDULED FORMALLY TO ASSUME HIS DUTIES HERE UNTIL EARLY MAY.

2. WIJEYERATNE OPENED CONVERSATION BY SAYING THAT, AS I PRESUMABLY KNEW, IN HIS EARLY YEARS HE HAD BEEN ATTRACTED TO COMMUNISM AND WAS MEMBER OF COMMUNIST PARTY BUT, HAVING BEEN REPELLED BY "VIOLENT TRADEY" OF HUNGARY AND CZECHOSLAVAKIA, HE HAD JOINED SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY. HE WAS NOT

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SOCIALIST AND DID NOT BELIEVE AMERICAN CAPITALISM WAS ADAPTED

TO SRI LANKA'S REQUIREMENTS BUT HE NONETHELESS APPRECIATED DESIRE OF BANDARANAIKE GOVERNMENT TO MOVE TOWARD "REAPPROCHMENT" WITH UNITED STATES. HE WANTED ME TO KNOW THAT HE HOPED IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES WOULD CONTINUE AND THAT HE AND I WOULD BE ABLE TO WORK OUT ANY DIFFERENCES WHICH MIGHT ARISE. IRONY OF SITUATION WAS THAT, ALTHOUGH US HAD PROVIDED MORE AID TO SRI LANKA THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY, US WAS COUNTRY MOST VULNERABLE TO ATTACK BY SRI LANKA LEFTISTS.

3. I REPLIED I CONSIDERED OUR RELATIONS QUITE GOOD AND I WOULD CERTAINLY LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH HIM TO KEEP THEM THAT WAY. I THEN RECOUNTED FACTORS WHICH, IN MY JUDGMENT, HAD LED TO POSITIVE EVOLUTION IN OUR RELATIONS, INCLUDING VARIOUS DEVELOPMENTS IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS, US DETENTE WITH SOVIET UNION, MOVES TOWARD NORMALIZATION OF US RELATIONS WITH PRC AND CONCLUSION VIET-NAM WAR. WIJEYERATNE SEIZED ON IMPROVED US-PRC RELATIONS AS SINGLE MOST POSITIVE ELEMENT IN SRI LANKA'S IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH USG, NOTING THAT THIS HAD HAD UNUSUALLY FAVORABLE IMPACT IN SRI LANKA. I WENT ON TO SAY THAT WHILE WE WOULD, OF COURSE, CONTINUE TO HAVE DIFFERENCES ON SPECIFIC PROBLEMS, I SAW NO FUNDAMENTAL CONFLICT BETWEEN US AND SRI LANKA ON VITAL ISSUES. OUR INTEREST WAS A POLITICALLY STABLE AND ECONOMICALLY VIABLE SRI LANKA AND WE HONORED AND RESPECTED COUNTRY'S NON-ALIGNMENT, SO LONG AS THAT NON-ALIGNMENT WAS A TRUE AND BALANCED ONE.

4. I REFERRED TO PRESS ACCOUNTS WIJEYERATNE PLANNED MAJOR SHAKE-UP IN FOREIGN OFFICE AND ASKED WHETHER HIS IDEAS HAD EVOLVED TO POINT HE COULD SHARE THEM WITH ME. HE SAID HE DID PLAN SOME CHANGES, INCLUDING LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAMS AND BETTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNGER OFFICERS. HOWEVER, THERE WOULD NOT BE LARGE SCALE CHANGES, EITHER IN PROCEDURES OR PERSONNEL OF FOREIGN OFFICE OR IN BASIC DIRECTION OF GSL'S FOREIGN POLICY. PRIME MINISTER HAD FELT THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO HAVE POLITICIAN IN FOREIGN OFFICE AND HE WOULD BE FULLY RESPONSIBLE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS WITH MDFA SECRETARY

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JAYASINGHE CONCENTRATING INCREASINGLY ON DEFENSE MATTERS. AFTER SOME "TRANSITION PERIOD," PRIME MINISTER WOULD DECIDE WHETHER TO ESTABLISH SEPARATE DEFENSE MINISTRY. I TOLD WIJEYERATNE STATE DEPT HAD PERIODICALLY UNDERTAKEN NUMBER OF STUDIES OF ITS ORGANIZATION, PROCEDURES AND PERSONNEL POLITICS AND, AT HIS REQUEST, AGREED TO SEND HIM SOME RESULTS OF THESE STUDIES.

5. COMMENT: TISSA WIJEYERATNE CONTRASTS SHARPLY WITH VERNON MENDIS, THE POLISHED PROFESSIONAL WHO LEFT LAST WEEK TO BECOME HIGH COMMISSIONER IN OTTAWA AFTER FIVE YEARS IN COLOMBO AS DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF MDFA. SON OF A FORMER UNP CABINET MINISTER AND FORMER CEYLONese HIGH COMMISSIONER IN LONDON AND NEW DELHI, WIJEYERATNE WAS EDUCATED IN ENGLAND AND HAS SPENT 17 YEARS ABROAD. NONETHELESS, AS INDICATED IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH ME AND IN HIS PUBLIC POSTURE, HE GOES OUT OF HIS WAY TO EMPHASIZE THAT HE IS A "MAN OF THE PEOPLE" AND A STRONG SOCIALIST SUPPORTER OF PRESENT BANDARANAIKE GOVT. BECAUSE OF HIS BACKGROUND AND ALLEGED TIES WITH PRIME MINISTERS LEFTIST DAUGHTER AND SON-IN-LAW, SUNETHRA AND KUMAR RUPASINGHE, SOME OF MY DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES ARE WARY OF WIJEYERATNE BUT IT IS OBVIOUSLY PREMATURE TO MAKE ANY JUDGMENTS. HOWEVER, IT DOES SEEM LIKELY THAT WITH WIJEYERATNE IN CHARGE OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SRI LANKA'S FOREIGN OFFICE MAY BE SOMEWHAT MORE LIVELY INSTITUTION TO DEAL WITH THAN FOREIGN OFFICE OF W.T. JAYASINGHE AND VERNON MENDIS. VAN HOLLEN

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